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~~SECRET/EXDIS~~

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Department of State

TELEGRAM

AV 12 US

160323

INDICATE:

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DISTRIBUTION

ACTION: Amembassy TEL AVIV

STATE

~~EXDIS~~

SUBJECT: TWA Hijacking

REF: A. TEL AVIV 3588

B. STATE 159327

1. We share Embassy Tel Aviv's concern that Israeli patience with our efforts to obtain release of two Israeli passengers may be running out (Ref A). Dept. officer received same impression from Israeli Counselor Raviv in September 18 conversation (para 4, Ref. B). Following is recapitulation our thinking.

2. We share Israeli outrage at continued illegal detention of two passengers. GOI has been fully informed of various measures we have employed in effort obtain their release. In employing these measures we have sought to avoid any appearance of coercion since it our considered opinion that this would be counterproductive. Syrian regime cannot afford publicly to appear to be submitting to American

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PA/HO, Department of State

E.O. 12958, as amended

June 22, 2004



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or Israeli pressures.

3. In any case, USG has little leverage at its disposal for use against Syrians. We do not rpt not know what Embassy has in mind when it advocates "hardhitting campaign" and "strong action against Syria in every way possible regardless of consequences". Even if such action were feasible, we question whether it would have desired results.

4. Proposal we do something prevent Syrian election to Security Council is non-starter. Given factsthat elections to SC are by secret ballot, that UN membership normally accepts regional choice, that Syria has Asian group endorsement, and that there are no rival candidates for seat Syria seeks, we see no way to prevent Syria's election or to use Syrian candidacy as bargaining counter in connection release of TWA passengers.

5. We understand that Syrians are embarrassed by presence of Israelis who thrust on them by PFLP and disapprove of hijacking.

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But Syrian regime is shaky and evidently fears domestic-- particularly Palestinian--repercussions if it relinquishes passengers without face-saving quid pro quo.

6. With above in mind, we have come to reluctant conclusion that the most promising method of getting the two passengers released would be via an Israeli ~~offer~~ offer of some quid pro quo. Experienced observers such as ICRC reps/ <sup>and</sup> Italian and other third party diplomats ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~--all of whom have been in close touch with responsible Syrian officials--concur this  
FYI. IATA DirGen also concurs. End FYI  
assessment. /We trust Israelis will give further thought to this possibility.

7. Meanwhile, we are continuing our efforts. We have again broached matter to Soviets, and we are considering a quiet but ~~WXXX~~ with Syrian representative direct initiative/in New York next week. Precipitate Israeli action would almost certainly damage prospects for success.

GP-3.

ACTING

RICHARDSON

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